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PRESS RELEASE

**AN INTERVIEW WITH THE
INDONESIAN FOREIGN MINISTER
ON EAST TIMOR**

Following is a transcript of an interview of Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas with a Portuguese Journalist at Jakarta Mandarin Hotel on 27 July 1991 :

Q : Mr. Ali Alatas, a few days ago, you said that Portugal didn't know what they are doing and want about the East Timor problem, what did you mean about it?

A : Well, when I said it of course I didn't say it in a derogatory manner, but I was stating what I thought was a fact, fact as it appears to us, because as you know, since 1983 when I was still in the United Nations as Ambassador, we started a dialogue with Portugal, with your Ambassador in the UN and also with the Secretary-General of the UN. And we've talked for many years. And the purpose of those talks was how to find the solution to the question of East Timor between Indonesia and Portugal that would satisfy Portugal, that would satisfy Indonesia, but also important, that it would satisfy the international community in the UN. A good solution that is good for the people of East Timor and good for everybody.

So we talked for many, many years, and we thought we got some progress there because we've cooperated, we've tried to understand each other better, we fulfilled many of the requests by Portugal, return of the ex-civil servants, we've returned them, return of the ex-

Portuguese Army officials, we've returned them. They've asked : "Can you guarantee complete religious freedom in writing ?" We've guaranteed in writing. "Can You Guarantee the preservation of Portuguese cultural, monuments and so on ?". Yes, you can see for yourself, you (the interviewer) have seen for yourself.

And so, we thought that we were making progress towards a solution. Yet, on the other hand, we (Indonesia) continued to be attacked in the press in various forums, in the UN, in the Commission on Human Rights, and during the last two years also in many of the forums in Europe, in the Commission of Europe and so on. In the Parliament of Europe they are attacking us very fiercely and saying all kinds of very bad things against Indonesia, so we asked Portugal : " What do you want, do you want to find a peaceful solution or do you want to continue to fight against Indonesia, to continue to have confrontations with Indonesia ?" and this has continued.

I've asked through the Secretary-General : "If you want a peaceful solution, if you want a good solution then we must try not to attack each other, but if you want to have confrontations with Indonesia, well, then we will have to respond and that would also be bad for Portugal as well as for Indonesia."

So, this is the background why I said : "I think Portugal does not know yet what it wants, what does it want ? Does it want to solve the problems or does it want to continue confrontations ?" That's the background of what I've said.

Q : So, in your opinion what do you think Portugal must now do to resolve these problems ?

A : I think that since 1983 and with the help of the United Nations' Secretary General, we have found a way, we have found strong evidence to find a good solution as I've explained, good for Portugal, for Indonesia, but also for the international community.

This is the forum that should be used by both sides and should really be approached with sincerity of intentions by both sides, namely to try to find a good solution. And therefore I like to again request through you (the interviewer) the note to the responsible authorities in Portugal : "Please let us restrain ourselves, let us not attack each other publicly". Because many of the things said about Indonesia are very "sharp", are not always the truth, and I as the Indonesian Foreign Minister sometimes cannot remain silent, I have to answer, because we have a Parliament too, we have public opinions too, we have our press too who will ask me : "Why do you remain silent when Portugal attacks us ?", "Why do you remain silent when Portugal talks about Indonesia without facts ?".

Q : In your opinion who is responsible for this situation ?

A : Who else, the political powers. Well , I wouldn't want to point to any particular side, but I think that I can understand that in Portuguese politics the question of East Timor is very sensitive. Both in the Parliament as well as in the Government, as well as outside the government in certain group of people. We understand that, we understand the sensitivity of this problem. But here in Indonesia, it becomes sensitive also when we are attacked on things that have not happened or that are not true, so then it becomes a very hot issue. Fortunately, so far we have been able to keep it restrained and not make a big issue out of that.

But I think to return to your question, I think sometimes it is all of these groups, the government, the parliament and sometimes the press that also make a big issue out of things that are not correct.

Q : Mr. Ali Alatas, two years ago the situation of the proper relationship between the two countries (Indonesia and Portugal) was very bad. In your opinion, are the two countries closer now to finding a good solution to this problem ?

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A: Well, we have hoped since we started the Dialogue in the United Nations, that the relationship would get gradually better. But a few years ago, after our first efforts to find a solution failed in 1987 because the Government of Portugal could not agree to a plan that was put forward by the Secretary-General of the UN, then of course, we had a rather bad period of relations for two or three years. And now I hope that with efforts to arrange for a mission by Portugal's Parliament to East Timor, we hope that it may contribute to better relations.

Q: What is the principal objective of this visit?

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A: Well, after the original plan by the Secretary-General of the United Nations to have a UN mission visit Indonesia and visit East Timor in 1987 did not materialize, the Portuguese side came up with the idea of having a Portuguese Parliament visit Indonesia. This idea came up in 1988 approximately. And since then we have been working on the modalities. But we agreed from the beginning that this would be one mission that would be an observatory mission, not an investigatory mission. It would be a mission of the Portuguese Parliament, but, some members of the Government could come along and also members of the press.

And thirdly we have lately agreed that this mission would also be accompanied by a mission of the UN, together with them (the Portuguese mission) to come to East Timor.

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So the purpose is to allow these missions to have a direct look at East Timor to see for themselves the real situation and to go around and talk with the people. They would be free to talk to anyone they would like to talk to, and then come back home and hopefully, we really hope that the members of the mission would have the political sincerity and courage to really say what they saw and not say other things. Because we have had an earlier experience, a rather not so good experience, we invited, upon his request, a member of (Portuguese) Parliament, alone to visit East Timor, I've forgotten his name but that happened several years ago. He came, we said: "You can visit East Timor". He went there alone, he

went around and talked to people and then came home through Jakarta, and he talk with a lot of people, and he said : "What I saw was completely different from what I've read in the Portuguese press, from what I've heard everyday in Portugal. And he was very impressed by what he saw, he said : "When I come home I'm going to tell the truth as I saw it" and we said : "Well, you can see now for yourself". And he went home and then he made a statement that was very bad for us, totally different from what he said to us than what he saw.

We had another experience, after many requests the (Portuguese) television crew wanted to go to East Timor, so we allowed them and we told them : "Look, we don't ask you to be totally 100 % good, pressmen must be free, sometimes critical on some aspects, but at least be objective. Then we are happy because there must be some bad things also but there are also many good things." So the crews said : "Thank you very much, we are going to make a film." And they shot there (in East Timor). When they came back they showed us part of the film, but no text, just the film because it was not yet ready. So we waited and then finally the film come out. We were shocked, because the film was the same but the words was totally different, they were (the words) so negative, for example they've shot a few children standing in line, I think before a school or something and said : "These are the lines of hungry people who are waiting to be given bread and rice". We know the shot from where they took it.

So, frankly speaking, we have some bad experience in the past regarding these visit ideas. I'm not saying that the forthcoming visit is going to be like this, but I hope that they will, as I've said, have the political integrity and the political courage to say, to tell your people what they really see. And I don't expect them to see 100 % goodness. In what country is there only 100% goodness ? No country. Every country has its weaknesses. We are a developing country.

East Timor has been a colony for 400 years, of course there are still things that are not yet good, not yet well developed, but there are many good things.

I think the message of this is that if we both love, both the Portuguese and the Indonesian people and the Indonesian and the Portuguese leaders love the East Timorese, that love must be expressed by giving them the chance now to work on their own development, if we give them the opportunity to make progress. Because if outside people continue to perpetuate the myth, to continue the dream as if the situation can be returned as you turn the clock back.

Q: You are trying to say that it is not possible.

A: It is not possible anymore, and it's not fair, because the majority of the people (in East Timor) have already decided, only a small minority that is against it (against integration).

In democracy you must give support to the majority never to the minority. That is a golden rule in democracy. Why not apply the golden rule of democracy here? The majority of the people have decided, and so, if you continue to perpetuate the myth, if you continue to feed on a myth that they can turn back, the ones that are going to suffer are the people of East Timor themselves. Then they dream and they think that certain things can happen, these little groups of people have poisoned the minds of others, you will continue the turbulence, continue the instability, continue the conflict. It's not good.

I think that ought to be the central message of this all. Let us all bury the past and look into the future and work together to make the future better for the East Timorese.
